

CHAPTER VI

THE GALLIPOLI PROBLEM IN JUNE

(Sketches 11, 12)

THE scene now changes back to Sir Ian Hamilton's dusty camp at Imbros on the 8th June.

Early that morning—the day after the new Dardanelles Committee had held their first meeting—a cable from Lord Kitchener announced the decision so eagerly awaited since the 17th May. Sir Ian was assured that his difficulties were realized and that the Cabinet meant to support him. Three divisions of the New Army would be sent out as fast as transports could be collected, and the last would probably arrive not later than "the first fortnight in July". The fleet would also be strengthened by many units less vulnerable to submarine attack than those already in the Aegean, and the army would be able to count on continuous naval support.

No time was lost in informing the weary troops on the peninsula that help would soon be on the way. But at General Headquarters the thought of the long time that must still elapse before the next big attack could begin went far to damp enthusiasm.

During the next few days four alternatives for the employment of the new troops on arrival were again passed under review:

1. A landing at Enos or north of Bulair;
2. A landing on the Asiatic shore;
3. Another effort to reach Kilid Bahr¹ from the south;
4. A big attack at Anzac, with the object of dominating the Narrows and severing the Turkish communications north of Kilid Bahr.

In addition to all the old attractions of a landing north of Bulair¹ there was now the further advantage that the occupation of that isthmus would enable supplies to be sent across it to

¹ See Vol. I. Chapter VI.

British submarines in the Marmara. But though the Turkish garrison at Bulair was believed to be smaller than in April,¹ the available landing-places were known to be heavily wired; and most of the reasons which had led to the rejection of this plan in the first instance were still present in undiminished force.

From a military point of view it was calculated that even to hold a defensive position astride the isthmus, north of the lines of Bulair, would need a force of three divisions, owing to the certainty of attack from the north as well as from the south. To capture the lines would involve prolonged siege operations and an even stronger force, which would further increase the difficulties of supply.

Finally, there was a new and insuperable objection. The admiral was now sternly opposed to a landing near Bulair. The presence of German submarines had added an incalculable hazard to the enterprise, and he could not guarantee the safety of transports proceeding so far north. Even if the troops succeeded in getting ashore, he could not keep them supplied; for all the needs of the army had now to be forwarded from Mudros in small vessels at night, and a new force, based on a beach 60 miles north of Anzac, could not be served by these means. For all these reasons, therefore, the Bulair project was rejected.

A landing on the Asiatic shore had attractive possibilities; for if the Allies could gain possession of the coast between Eren Keui and Yeni Shehr they would be able to free their trenches at Helles from enfilade shell fire, and by advancing against the Narrows defences at Chanak might hope to reduce the Turkish strength on the peninsula.

But the disadvantages of this scheme were numerous. The actual landing might prove more costly than anything experienced on the 25th April. The beach defences had been strengthened, and the possible landing-places were defended by artillery, which, owing to the presence of German submarines, the navy could not subdue. To make a serious advance on Chanak, with the right flank exposed and a long line of communications to be kept open, would need a force of at least six divisions.

There remained the alternative of a smaller operation; such as the seizure of a bridgehead near Kum Kale, with the object of protecting the European shore from shell fire and

¹ It is now known that the garrison in the Bulair area at the end of April was 2 divisions, in May one division, and at the beginning of August 3 divisions.

attracting Turkish forces to the Asiatic side by the mere threat of an advance on Chanak. But even a bridgehead would require at least two divisions for its protection, and though it might attract a number of Turks to the southern side of the Straits, there seemed little chance of the enemy forces on the peninsula being sufficiently weakened to enable a decisive success to be gained either at Anzac or Helles. Such a diversion, in fact, would mean an almost profitless dispersal of Sir Ian Hamilton's forces, leaving him strong nowhere. It would, moreover, necessitate the opening of a new line of supply, and throw a further strain on the navy's resources. Even General Gouraud, whose troops were the worst sufferers from Asiatic shell fire, dismissed this project as a "purely defensive measure which "would not bring the campaign a single step nearer to final "victory".

At VIII Corps headquarters it was still urged that a grand attack on the Turkish southern front with fresh troops and abundance of gun-ammunition would end in a "break-through",¹ but at General Headquarters it was held that the heavy losses incurred on the 4th June, the lack of elbow-room for reserves, and the fact that new lines of Turkish trenches were being started both north and south of Achi Baba, all emphasized the slow, costly, and arduous nature of any attempt to reach the Kilid Bahr plateau from the south. General Headquarters was still of opinion that the Achi Baba ridge might be taken as a result of hard and continuous pressure, but it was held that a quicker and more certain plan must be found for the capture of Kilid Bahr.²

¹ In view of the successes subsequently gained on that front on 28th June and 12th July (see Chapters VII. and VIII.) it may be urged that this opinion had some justification.

² In the latter half of June, owing to the continued growth of the Turkish defences, even the capture of Achi Baba began to be regarded at G.H.Q. as a doubtful possibility. A General Staff memorandum prepared for the C.-in-C. on 23rd June ran as follows:

" Though the Krithia position might eventually be captured by a frontal attack with the assistance of the three new divisions, the undertaking would be exceedingly costly. It must also be remembered that the Krithia position can no longer be counted on to give us possession of the Achi Baba ridge. Achi Baba is $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles in rear of the present Turkish front line, and immediately in front of it and stretching from shore to shore, with the flanks bent back to guard against outflanking movements from the sea, the enemy has now constructed a new line of trenches which seem to be as strong as those which now face us. Unless the Turks are driven out of their present line with very heavy loss, it must be taken as certain that this new position will be held with equal determination, more especially since, even if the western flank of it fell into our hands, the eastern and central sections, with the assistance of a line of trenches which connect the western shoulder of the peak with the Kilid Bahr plateau, could be held as a bastion of the main Kilid Bahr position."

[See over.]

Sketch 11. In favour of a big attack from Anzac there was a great deal to be said. According to the scheme submitted by General Birdwood on the 30th May, there was a reasonable chance of his reaching a commanding position overlooking the Narrows with the help of four extra brigades. A further strong thrust from that line might place his force astride the peninsula and sever the enemy's southern communications.

General Birdwood's project was strongly supported at General Headquarters, where an additional advantage claimed for it was that after the capture of Chunuk Bair and the occupation of a position astride the peninsula, the weakly defended coast line at Suvla would automatically fall into British hands. It was held that after the Turks had been driven from in front of Anzac they would probably retire south to Kildi Bahr, whence they and the Turks in the southern zone might still be supplied for a time by way of Chanak and the Narrows. In this case several weeks might elapse before Kildi Bahr was taken, and if the campaign were thus prolonged into the autumn, the possession of Suvla Bay would ensure a comparatively safe harbour for the northern British force at a time when strong winds might make it almost impossible to land supplies and stores at Anzac. As yet, however, there was no suggestion of a simultaneous landing at Suvla to support the Anzac operations.

It was the Anzac scheme which had for some time been making the greatest appeal to Sir Ian Hamilton's imagination, and it was that scheme which he now¹ determined to adopt, subject to there being no radical change in the tactical situation before the new divisions arrived. In the meantime General Birdwood was instructed to work out, in the utmost secrecy, a detailed plan of operation.

General Birdwood, as we have already seen, had originally placed his requirements in troops for the first phase of the main operations at four infantry brigades in addition to his own corps. But hearing on the 8th June that three new divisions were coming out, he had asked that, as a measure of safety, another division might be held at his disposal for use in case of need. Sir Ian Hamilton not only acceded to this request, but had decided before the middle of June to allot the 52nd Division and all three New Army divisions to the northern zone, where the

The memorandum went on to consider the possibility of turning the Krithia and Ach Baba defences by a landing between Kum Tepe and Gaba Tepe, but this scheme, too, was rejected as impracticable.

¹ Telegram to Lord Kitchener, dated 13th June: "I only await the promised reinforcements to take the next step in prosecution of my main plan from Anzac."

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decisive blow was to be struck. Two of these divisions would be given to General Birdwood for the first phase—the capture of Chunuk Bair and the breaking out from the existing Anzac position. Then, as more room became available, a third and if necessary a fourth division could follow, these additional troops being landed either at Anzac or further north as might be most convenient.

Sir Ian Hamilton further decided that every effort must be made during the next few weeks to induce the Turks to expect a landing on the Asiatic side of the Straits, and he begged Lord Kitchener not to contradict any impression to that effect which might get about in London.

Sir Ian Hamilton had asked General Gouraud to express his views on the situation, and in a memorandum which reached G.H.Q. on the 14th June the French commander again expressed the opinion that the coming main offensive should be launched at Anzac rather than at Helles or on the Asiatic shore. His first choice, he told the Commander-in-Chief, would be for a landing north of Bulair. But if that was held by the Allied admirals to be impossible, he counselled an attack from the neighbourhood of Gaba Tepe, with the object of pushing forward to Maidos, severing the enemy's communications, and forming a base in Kilia Bay for British submarines operating in the Marmara. "I look upon Gouraud more as a coadjutor than "as a subordinate," wrote Sir Ian Hamilton in his diary that evening, "so it is worth anything to me to find that we see eye to eye at present."¹

To those in close touch with prevailing conditions on the peninsula it was clear that the long period of waiting till the middle of July was bound to be full of anxiety, especially in the southern zone. The invading troops at their best had proved themselves superior to the Turks, though the Turk was fighting as bravely as he had ever fought before. But there was no disguising the fact that every unit in the Expeditionary Force was feeling the prolonged strain, and that owing to the paucity of reinforcing drafts, a good many battalions, particularly in the case of the 42nd Division, were dwindling towards inefficiency. In anything like equal proportions an amalgam of veteran soldiers and young recruits can be trusted to produce a fine fighting battalion. The veterans give experience and steadiness; the recruits are fresh and keen and determined to prove themselves the equal of the "old hands". But on the 18th June it was calculated that, after the arrival of all the drafts on passage from England, and without allowing for further casualties in

¹ "Gallipoli Diary", i. pp. 295-6.

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the meantime, the infantry units of the 42nd Division would need another 6,000 men to bring them up to their proper establishment. Indeed, the moment seemed not far distant when the existing cadres would be too weak to absorb and shape a large influx of inexperienced men without a prolonged period of training out of the line.¹

This situation would have been less serious if the Turks had suffered from a similar handicap. But whereas all the infantry battalions under Sir Ian Hamilton's command had lost the greater part of their best officers and men, the enemy was free to draw upon the best of the Turkish army to fill the wastage in his ranks. Thus the invaders, many of whom had been almost continually under fire since the 25th April, were constantly being called upon to meet fresh troops. The strain was aggravated in the south by the fact that since the arrival of German submarines, and the withdrawal of the support of heavy naval guns, the fire of the Turkish batteries had sensibly increased, especially those on the Asiatic shore.

Even when units were in reserve, or withdrawn to the so-called "rest areas" for a short spell out of the trenches, they were never free from this shelling; and it was not unusual for a resting battalion to have as many casualties in 24 hours as a battalion in the front line.

Added to these depressing conditions the climate was now becoming a remorseless enemy. The heat of the noon-day sun was intense; there was little or no shade; and the scanty water supply in the trenches was rarely sufficient for men with a parching thirst.² The sickening smell of unburied corpses in No Man's Land pervaded the front areas; dense clouds of infected dust were incessant; and despite the preventive care of the doctors there was such a loathsome plague of huge flies (known to the troops as "corpse-flies") that it was difficult to eat a mouthful of food without swallowing the pests. A tin of beef or jam, as soon as opened, would be covered with a thick film of flies, and amongst the troops in the trenches small pieces

¹ At this time the machinery for supplying drafts to Territorial battalions overseas was most unsatisfactory. The 2nd-Line units, formed from the men left behind, were themselves training for active service, and they naturally grudged their best men for replacing wastage in 1st-Line battalions. The efficiency of the drafts which did arrive was often very low, and many men reaching the peninsula had never fired a rifle.

² Here, again, the Turks had an immeasurable advantage. General Kannengiesser writes that one of the chief factors responsible for the Turkish success was "the beautiful, clear, flowing drinking water available on the heights of Gallipoli even in the hottest summer". He adds: "If we also had been forced to bring our water in tank ships to Gallipoli, and then to bring it up on donkeys' backs to the trenches, the bodily resistance of the Turks would have broken down." "Gallipoli", pp. 224, 226.

of veiling, to throw over their faces at meal times or when trying to sleep, were almost beyond price.

By the middle of June not only the spirits but the physical health of the troops began to be affected by the squalid misery of their surroundings. The daily number of sick was increasing by leaps and bounds; and there was scarcely a man on the peninsula who was not a victim to the prevailing epidemic of dysenteric diarrhoea. The one saving feature was the sea-bathing. Every hour of the day the coast would be fringed with naked figures forgetting their troubles in the blue waters of the Aegean! Even the bathers were exposed to enemy shell fire, but the refreshing joy of a splash in the sea was worth the risk involved.

Such being the situation on the peninsula, there can be little wonder that amongst those in authority on the southern front there was still an urgent desire to gain more ground, and to free the beaches and rest camps from enemy observation by the capture of Achi Baba. Both General Hunter-Weston and General Gouraud were still confident that by means of a succession of small, carefully planned, and strictly limited attacks, supported by all the available artillery, it would be possible to make good progress withoutordinate loss.

Lord Kitchener was anxious that the energies of the Expeditionary Force should as far as possible be conserved till the arrival of all the reinforcements permitted the delivery of a sudden and decisive blow. In theory this view corresponded with Sir Ian Hamilton's own wishes. But in practice, with a determined enemy in front of him and the sea immediately behind, it was impossible to adopt a purely passive attitude. Not only was it a moral and material necessity to gain more elbow-room at Helles, but it was essential to maintain an active policy, in order to keep up the offensive spirit of the troops and preserve some sort of moral ascendancy over the Turks. A further inducement to continue the fight for Achi Baba was the hope that, if that ridge could be captured before the arrival of the new divisions, the garrison at Helles could then be reduced and more troops made available for the main offensive at Anzac.

The Commander-in-Chief therefore decided about the 15th June that the preparations for new attacks in the south, which the French and the VIII Corps had been making ever since the Third Battle of Krithia, should be allowed to continue. Even if they failed to achieve as much success as expected they would at least distract attention from General Birdwood's front, where, as at present intended, the main

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operations were to be staged. It was stipulated at this time, however, that neither the 52nd Division nor any portion of the three New Army divisions was to be employed in offensive operations before the big attack.

The three new divisions for Gallipoli were to be sent out organized as a corps,¹ and Sir Ian Hamilton was early in correspondence with Lord Kitchener on the subject of a suitable officer for this important command. Lord Kitchener had proposed on the 9th June that Lieut.-General Sir Bryan Mahon, who had raised and trained the 10th Division, should be given command of the corps; but Sir Ian Hamilton begged that either General Byng or General Rawlinson should be appointed. This suggestion was not agreed to. Both these officers were serving in France, and Lord Kitchener refused even to ask Sir John French to spare their services for Gallipoli. He pointed out, moreover, that they were both junior to General Mahon, and that as Mahon must at least be allowed to lead in the field the division he had trained so well, a senior officer must be found to command the corps.² General Mahon, however, was himself a senior lieutenant-general; and there were only two available officers in the army who fulfilled Lord Kitchener's condition. Sir Ian Hamilton was given the choice of these two. The build of one of them, however, would have made it impossible for him to withstand the Gallipoli climate. The other was General Stopford; and General Stopford was appointed.

Lieut.-General Hon. Sir Frederick Stopford, who thus found himself, by the accident of seniority, in command of the IX Corps, was 61 years old.³ Entering the Grenadier Guards at the end of the Franco-Prussian war, he had served as A.D.C. in Egypt and the Soudan in the 'eighties, and on the staff of the bloodless expedition to Ashanti in '895. In 1899 he went out to South Africa as military secretary to Sir Redvers Buller, returning to England with his chief the following year. Subsequently he commanded the London District, and on the outbreak of the Great War was placed at the head of a Home Defence army. A keen soldier throughout his service, he had lived entirely for his profession, and his courtesy and personal charm had won him the affection of all who came in contact with him. But in 1915 his health was far from good, and he had never before commanded troops in war.

¹ See Order of Battle at end of Volume.

² Later the army paid dearly for this refusal to ask Sir John French for the services of a specially qualified officer to command the new corps, and for this unfortunate adherence to the principle of Army List seniority.

No anxiety weighed more heavily upon Sir Ian Hamilton at this period than the inadequate artillery equipment of his force, and its totally inadequate supply of ammunition.¹ There was an urgent need to silence the enemy's heavy guns on the Asiatic shore; and if severe casualties were to be avoided in future trench attacks, more howitzers were essential to prepare the way for the infantry.

The fire of the Turkish medium and heavy artillery² could only be silenced by similar or larger guns. Of these, on the 10th June, the Helles force had nothing but four 60-pdrs., only two of which were serviceable. The other two were out of action through quite minor defects, but there were no spare parts to repair them.

As regards the main offensive from Anzac there was no great uneasiness at G.H.Q. on the score of howitzer support, for it was believed that the three new divisions would have their full complement of artillery, including sixteen 4·5-inch howitzers for each division. But the question of support for the coming attacks at Helles was still an anxious problem. Against deep, narrow, well loop-holed trenches the effect of 18-pdr. shrapnel was practically valueless, and the four divisions of the VIII Corps could muster only twelve howitzers between them.³ But owing to the great shortage of British war material, Sir Ian Hamilton did not feel justified in asking for more guns for Gallipoli. He did point out, however, his great weakness in artillery, and urged that everything possible should be done to increase his ammunition. He also begged that the three new divisions should be sent out with their normal artillery establishment.

Both these requests had to be refused. On the 16th June Lord Kitchener cabled that it would be impossible to increase the ammunition supply, that owing to the shortage of 4·5-inch ammunition the 13th Division (the first to sail) could only be equipped with 5-inch howitzers, and that the other two divisions would bring no howitzers at all. "Even if more 5-inch howitzers were sent to you", this message continued, "the fortnightly supply of ammunition for them would be very small."

The 5-inch howitzers were relics of the South African War.

¹ On 16th June there were only 380 rounds of 4·5-inch ammunition at Helles and 878 rounds of 6-inch H.L.

² As far as could be ascertained the Turks now had seven medium and heavy pieces on the Asiatic shore in addition to numerous field guns and howitzers which continually changed their positions.

³ Four 6-inch, four 4·5-inch; and four 5-inch howitzers belonging to the 52nd Division. This division brought out eight 5-inch howitzers, but one battery was sent to Anzac.

Even in their prime they had not been very satisfactory, and by 1915 they were so worn and inaccurate as to be of little real value when fine shooting was required. This news, therefore, was a bitter disappointment, and Sir Ian Hamilton allowed himself for once to indulge in plain speaking. "We realize "for our part", he cabled to Lord Kitchener, "that in the "matter of guns and ammunition it is no good crying for the "moon, and for your part you must recognize that until "howitzers and ammunition arrive, it is no good crying for "the crescent."

The collection of transports for three divisions, and the preparation of a table of embarkation and sailings, necessarily took time, but on the 21st June Sir Ian Hamilton was informed that the last unit of the 13th Division might be expected at Mudros by the 10th July, the last of the 10th Division by the 18th July, and that of the 11th by the 28th.

A training report from the War Office stated that the 11th Division was perhaps the best of the three, while another telegram from Lord Kitchener announced for the first time the names of the three divisional commanders and, in an estimate of their respective capabilities, implied that General Hammersley would be more likely to shine in open fighting than in trench warfare. This message, coupled with the War Office training report, was the cause which eventually resulted in the 11th Division being chosen for the Suvla landing.

The unavoidable delay in the arrival of the third division—it was originally expected that all three would be ready for action by the middle of July—was very disconcerting. It gave more time for a leakage of the British plans and for the Turks to make their counter-preparations. Nevertheless Sir Ian Hamilton resolved to adhere to his original decision and not to launch his main offensive till the whole force had arrived. This was a wise precaution. Not only would it secure him the presence of what was apparently his best new division at the outset of the operations. It would also provide him with a comparatively strong general reserve, the need of which had been felt so acutely in all his previous battles.

Obviously, if the question of time had been less important, it would have been advisable, before the main operations began, to give all three divisions a little experience of active service conditions. This, however, was impossible. Every circumstance dictated that the new blow should be struck at the earliest practicable moment, and all that could be done was to land the 13th Division for a short spell of duty at Helles while waiting for the 10th and 11th Divisions to arrive.

EVENTS AT HELLES, 6TH-20TH JUNE

The 52nd (Lowland) Division, commanded by Major-General G. G. A. Egerton, began to arrive from Scotland on the 6th June, and was allotted to the VIII Corps.¹

The departure of this division from Scotland was marked by cruel misfortune, for two companies of the 1/7th Royal Scots, travelling to Liverpool, the port of embarkation, were the victims of one of the most serious accidents in the history of British railways. Of 15 officers and 483 men in the troop train, 3 officers and 207 men were killed, and 5 officers and 219 other ranks injured.

In another accident the 1/4th Royal Scots narrowly escaped disaster. The small steamer *Reindeer*, carrying this battalion at night from Mudros to Helles, collided with a similar vessel—the *Immingham*—returning empty from the peninsula. The *Immingham* sank immediately, but the *Reindeer*, though badly holed, got safely back to Mudros. There was no sign of panic on board; the troops upheld the best traditions of the Service, and no loss of life was incurred.

After the arrival of the 52nd Division it was at last possible to give some of the Helles garrison a few days' rest from the constant strain of the peninsula, and towards the middle of June the most weary units of the VIII Corps were sent across to Imbros, in batches of 500 per night, for a welcome change of air. Later in the campaign it became possible to do a great deal more in this respect, and large rest-camps were opened at Mudros and Imbros.

In preparation for the operations to be undertaken at Helles in the hope of reaching Achi Baba, several minor attacks were made on the outlying Turkish works during the second and third weeks of June. A marked feature of previous fighting at Helles had been the determined resistance which the enemy always offered in the neighbourhood of the three ravines—Kanlı Dere, Kirte Dere and the deep Gully Ravine—which intersected the opposing lines. At the three places where these ravines cut the British line, there were considerable re-entrants, where the Turkish trenches jutted into the British position, and these re-entrants were the scene of most of the intermittent fighting in the middle weeks of June.

'Typical of this fighting was a small enterprise carried out on

¹ See Order of Battle. The 155th Brigade (Br.-General F. Erskine) landed on 6th-7th June. The 156th Brigade (Br.-General W. Scott-Moncrieff) landed on 12th-14th June. The 157th Brigade (Br.-General P. W. Hendry) was kept in Egypt till more room was available at Helles, and did not arrive till 3rd July.

the night of the 10th/11th June by detachments from the 1/Border Regiment and the 2/South Wales Borderers. Jutting out from the eastern side of the Gully Ravine re-entrant were two short lengths of the old Turkish front line system which had defied all attempts at capture in the battle of the 4th June. The southern and shorter trench was known to the British as the "Boomerang"; the northern and longer piece which ran right across the re-entrant and up to the existing British line was called "Turkey Trench". The task on the 10th/11th June was to straighten the British line by capturing both these works. Three times the South Wales Borderer detachment succeeded in entering the Boomerang, but each time was driven back by bombing attacks from the ravine. The party from The Border Regiment succeeded in capturing about 70 yards of Turkey Trench, and this gain was held.

Repeated efforts were made by the Turks to recapture it, culminating on the night of the 15th/16th June in a fierce bombing attack supported by artillery and machine-gun fire. The garrison of the barricade on this occasion was furnished by the 1/Royal Dublin Fusiliers, and after all the bombers had become casualties the remainder, including the occupants of some half-finished saps on either flank, were forced to retire. About 5 A.M., however, a bombing counter-attack was carried out by a small party of the 1/Royal Munster Fusiliers under Lieut. G. R. Prendergast. All the lost ground was recaptured, and the Turks suffered heavily from machine-gun fire as they retired across the open. They made no further attempt to regain what they had lost of Turkey Trench, but the Boomerang was converted into a formidable redoubt.

Sketch 6.

THE BATTLE OF THE 21ST JUNE, 1915. THE FRENCH OBJECTIVES.

